ROGER RABBIT REDUX

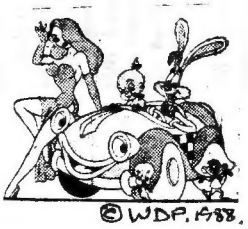
Nostalgia. I got irritated a few times when I was writing about Garis and Burgess and people said I was writing nostalgia with the implication that this was negative. Fact is, none of it is nostalgia for the young reader who has never heard of these writers. It is only nostalgia for the seasoned vet who has read and heard everything, the guy who is reminded of his own childhood when he sees Uncle Wiggily or Peter Rabbit. This entire anti-nostalgia attitude is nothing but a market ploy. The entertainment industry has to negate the old and promote the new in order to keep the bucks rolling in. What is Roger Rabbit but Bugs Bunny in clown make-up?

In Gary Wolf's 1981 novel, WHO CENSORED ROGER RABBIT?, the bunny is obviously Bugs, though he is about the same height as Harvey. Who's Harvey? He was an invisible Pooka who appeared in a single play named for himself by Mary Chase back in 1944. Actually, she copyrighted the play as THE WHITE RABBIT in 1943. Harvey hung out with Elwood P. Dowd (pretty close to Elmer Fudd) who was portrayed by James Stewart in the 1950 film version. There wasn't really any significance to Harvey being a rabbit anymore than there is to Roger, because he could have been any kind of animal or creature. He was just another in a long series of talking animals. Wolf alludes to numerous strip characters in his novel, which is logical since his book and the ROGER RABBIT movie are miles apart. About all Spielberg did was buy the rights. Animator Richard Williams and Director Robert Zemeckis took a few ideas from the book, then improvised the rest. I think they were so proccupied with the form that the content got away from them. Ballantine has reissued the novel to cash in on the movie and it reads well. I liked it better than the film, mainly because the plot is more cohesive and I was able to get more of a feel for the characters. I sort of hated that Marvel plot that filled up the second half of ROGER RABBIT, that re-make of the worst of HOWARD THE DUCK. Judge Doom and his steamroller and the Dip and all that crapola. At least this time, nobody sold the idea of having a guy walking around in a rabbit costume, and we got some great animation, but, truthfully, some of that stuff was just too dumb. Those weasels from WIND IN THE WILLOWS were a real drag.

Nobody seems to be bothered by the bestiality of the film. People I have talked to think it's okay for a woman to be married to a rabbit. Hey, it was okay for Betty Boop to hug and kiss and hang out with her dog, Bimbo, for ten years, but then Betty started out as a dog in her first cartoon, DIRTY DISHES (1930), and Jessica Rabbit doesn't have that excuse. In the film, this is never explained, but in Wolf's novel Roger found a magic lantern and used one of his wishes to make Jessica marry him, hence she only did it because the genie made her do it. Book and film retain the idea of Toons being real and working for real people, but Wolf deals with the comic strip world, not with animation and much of his plot concerns ripped off strip art. From the prices, we know we are in the contemporary world, because strip art wasn't valued at all until recently. When people began to be interested in Carl Barks' work in the seventies, an editor at Western told me after Barks' duck pages were shot, the originals were thrown in the trash behind the building. Obviously, Spielberg had to dump this plot since he opted for a story set in 1947. While Wolf alludes to Smilin' Jack, Smokey Stover, Dick Tracy, and other stars of strip art, Speilberg rehashes a Hammett plot interspersed with what are mainly ideas from Tex Avery cartoons. Disney characters play a negligible part in the film. In Wolf, there is one allusion to Mickey Mouse inside a mousehole in Eddie Valiant's apartment, and that's it for Disney. Since Spielberg and Disney were doing the first team-up of their characters, some attempt at equal time had to be made, but it really amounts to overkill.

The Warner cartoons were still going full blast in 1947 and Bugs Bunny had been a big star since 1942. Roger Rabbit seems to be based on a combination of Nutsy Squirrel and the earlier Bugs Bunny, the zany Daffy Duck imitation who appeared in the first two Bugs cartoons in 1939. Roger is nothing like Max Hare from whom Bugs was swiped by the Warner gang, but he does have a little in common with Disney's conception of Brer Rabbit, the most recent rabbit character to appear circa 1947. Brer Rabbit starred in SONG OF THE SOUTH with a lot of humans in 1946 and he sort of has a bulb nose like the one given to Roger. Wolf had the idea that Toons could create doubles of themselves by thinking them up. These doubles or doppelgangers took the punishment on camera just like stunt people. I don't know why this idea wasn't used in the film, because it is unique.

In Wolf's book, characters have contracts with publishers and they pose for strips. Wolf suggested the discrimination against the Toons, that they were second class citizens who lived in a ghetto, and he parallels their experience with both that of Black people and of Indians. On the other hand neither Wolf nor the filmmakers seem to be aware that women suffer the same kind of treatment. Both Jessica and her real life counterpart who works in the saloon are sex objects and victims. The one character who leaned toward a self-determined lifestyle, Carol Masters, the photographer in Wolf's novel, has been dropped from the film. As a hero, the film presents a middle-aged white alcoholic. There isn't really any social consciousness to speak off in WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT? It's a study in technique and functions as a monolithic ad. Half the people in the theater will be thinking about getting themselves a diet coke or running across the mall to MacDonald's because of the tie-ins. I hate this sort of thing, personally. I don't want to be reminded of products by the characters I see on film and I resent this intrusion on my consciousness. There isn't anything subtle about the technique at all. I loved the animation in the film, but turning it into one gigantic ad for junk food is degrading to all the talented people who participated in the project; it makes the film just one more testament to the incredible greed that typifies this era we're living through.



COMIX PLUGOLA

CEREBUS at #111. Comico has just published the book version of the first part of Matt Wagner's GRENDEL, illustrated by the Pander Brothers.* Lee Meryl has HAIRBOY 2. 60¢ pp. 1 David Lane, Apt 4-A, Yonkers, N Y 10701.* Mick Cusimano has MODERN ART. 75¢ pp. POB 2565, Harvard Square Station, Cambridge, MA 02238.* FROG AND DOG 1 is $1 pp from James Gill, 837 Park Ave., Tallahassee, FLA 32301.* MR. FIX'S LOST SLICE AT SMUTPUTT! is 75¢ pp from Scott Stevens, 2725 Franklin, #1211, Mesquite, TX 75150.* MISC 24 is $1 pp from Randy Laske, 656 Birch Lane, Gilbert, MN 55741.* THE SAVAGE SWORD OF MIKE 1 by Matt Howarth is $2.75 pp from Fandom House, POB 1348, Denver, CP 80201. PHOENIX RESTAURANT is a nice book of drawings from the same publisher. $4.50 pp. * ANT BOY 1 is 2.75 pp from Steeldragon Press, Box 7253, Powderhorn Sta, Mpls, MN 55407.*

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JEROME DAVID SALINGER

The first time I heard about J. D. Salinger I was working on the primary belt at the Rincon Annex of the San Francisco Post Office in 1961 with a Columbia drop-out named John Bennett. For a long time, Bennett and I were cagey and didn't really talk to each other, then we began to discover a lot of intellectual quirks in common and for a long time after that we were good buddies. We were both temps at the post office, students who worked four hours a day to help with the rush of afternoon mail. We were called blue badges in contrast to the tired-looking white-faced guys who were known as regulars, the guys who often put in ten or twelve hours a day. It's deadly work, casing mail, sacking, pushing gurneys across miles of concrete from one station to the next. The boredom would kill any thinking person if he couldn't talk endlessly with those around him. I was always a blabbermouth, always walking around talking about Chaucer or Shakespeare while sorting packages or dumping mail on the City Dump. John became a close friend and taught me more than a lot of my profs at State. He loved to analyze literature, to get at the symbols inherent in stories. It was John who said, laughing himself, that 'the laughing man' was Jesus.

We all loved the work of Salinger in the early sixties. We followed each new story as it came out just as we were to follow the symbolism of bob dylan's lyrics a few years later. No one realized when *Hapworth, 1924* came out in THE NEW YORKER in 1965 that we were reading the last public statement of Salinger, a coda to the Glass family which had preoccupied him from the late forties on. Everyone read and re-read THE CATCHER IN THE RYE, FRANNY AND ZOOEY, and RAISE HIGH THE ROOF BEAM, CARPENTERS, Seymour Glass had committed suicide in *A FINE DAY FOR BANANAFISH* in 1948. Everyone I knew had a copy of the Signet edition of the NINE STORIES Salinger chose to reprint from his early work. One of the most interesting characters was Seymour Glass. Old Seymour became a puzzle for all academe and we had a lot of fun speculating on the various reasons, realistic and mystical, for his suicide Was his fashion plate wife, Muriel, based on the French woman Salinger married just after the war? Who was that enigmatic little girl he met on the beach. At that time, none of us knew of Salinger's experience as a soldier involved in the invasion of Normandy in June of 1944 or we might have understood Seymour's postwar neurosis. The father of one of my sister's closest high school friends returned from Europe after the war and one day he went out in a Nebraska field and hanged himself from an elm tree.

Everyone was curious about Salinger. Who was this guy? Was he anything like Holden Caulfield? Did he really go to a military academy? Did he have a baby sister? Was he a Jesus freak? What was his trip anyway? While I was at State, Mark Harris got a gig from LIFE to go to New Hampshire and do a piece on Salinger. What followed was one of the longest articles I have seen about everything but the subject. Harris never talked to Salinger, because Salinger doesn't talk to strangers. He dropped out of the New York literary scene very early and retired to Cornish, New Hampshire. He married Claire in February of 1955 and raised his family (Margaret, born in 1955, and Matthew, born in 1960). He had wanted fame and notoriety as a young man, but found it a disappointment. Salinger liked to preach and he found people a bit put out when he told them where it was at at parties. A successful literary lion he was not, nor did he want to be.

All of this is spelled out in Ian Hamilton's SEARCH FOR J. D. SALINGER (1988), a book that shouldn't have been published. This is a good biography, well written, informative, etc., but it was not authorized by Salinger; in fact, he sued to prevent it. This only made things worse, because it forced him to go public. He had to go to New York to give his deposition and the lawyer who took it became famous as the only person who ever got an interview out of Salinger. Well, what about this? Does Salinger have a right to his privacy? Are his letters in the public domain? Do they belong to him or just to anyone who decides to sit down and construct a biography around them? Do we have a right to know all the intimate details of this man's life just because he wrote some stories a few years back? Does writing make one a public figure like a politician or an actor? Obviously, Hamilton feels the public has a right to know about someone who has sold as many novels as Salinger and the curious would agree with him. If you have been in the public eye, however briefly, you might be inclined to side with the author. It is realistic to think that a gossip-hungry populace is always going to want to know the color of a celebrity's bedsheets and the scandal tabloids in the super market feed this lust for minutia, where a literary Salinger wanted then he wanted to that easy. There is his redwood home wife has had to tu few groupies and p search for Salinger He has a lot of tru He's the guru and Surely, his own philosophy have ta

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you might find exactly the opposite. I expect Salinger was a good father. I've seen his son on television a number of times and I'd say he got a lot of what he is from his dad. I don't know this. He may write his own Daddy Dearest in a couple of years like many celebrity sons, but it's simply a fact that Salinger tried to protect his children from the rat race. They were raised in a small town where they could grow up playing baseball, swimming, biking, hiking, and living normal lives instead of snorting coke with the brat pack and getting burned out before they even started living. Harrison is punishing Salinger in print for not cooperating with *his* book and he has no right to do that. He is the intruder, not the nice guy he wants us to think he is.

It's my own feeling that Salinger wrote himself into a corner with the Glass family and as the years passed he realized he had said what he wanted to say. He no longer wanted to talk to the public. Now the ordinary person isn't going to understand this very well, but most writers will. When I write this newsletter each month I always deal with the conflict of writing partially to people I know and like, folks I want to communicate with, and partially to people I don't really like or want to talk to at all. No writer has control over who reads his stuff. You get it out there and it's read by the good, the bad, and the ugly. Fine, but if you think about that, if you let it bother you, it can clog up the creative arteries. You can think, I don't really want to talk to those people at all. Any teacher can understand this problem. You walk in the classroom and there are the friends and enemies all sitting together. You have to address your remarks to them all.

I think Salinger's experience with the hype side of publishing, the promo parties, and particularly with people who edited and changed his stuff proved too negative for him. He just got sick of it all and quit. I think it bothered him to see all those academic careers kept alive with parasitic articles interpreting his material, the myth and symbol, theme and structure gang who have a stranglehold on the eclectic quarterlies. Salinger has never been a mystery to me. He wrote some fascinating stories and I enjoyed them and in my book the man has a right to retire to the country and tend his garden. He certainly has a right to decide if and when his own personal letters will be published.

UNDERGROUND COMIX CATALOG
Once again I have revised my catalog of underground comix. $1 gets you a listing of 700 titles, including reading copies and rarities, 'homegrowns' and major titles. CRUMB, BODE, CORBEN, and SPIEGELMAN are all here.
BRUCE SWEENEY
85 WALTHAM #5
BOSTON, MA 02118

SUBSCRIBERS NOTE: IF YOU HAVE AN 88 ON YOUR ADDRESS LABEL, IT IS TIME TO RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION. $7.50 FOR 1989. IF YOU WANT YOUR COMIC MENTIONED IN COMIX PLUGOLA, SEND TWO COPIES TO COMIX WAVE.

SAN DIEGO COMICON '88

In the fifteen years I have attended the San Diego Comic Convention I have seen it grow from a small organization to a massive adjunct to the Eastern comics industry. This is not particularly bad, just different, but nonetheless I cannot help but feel the impersonal nature of what is now a giant trade show with just about everything else lost in the shuffle. This year there were two giant dealer's rooms, one filled with all of the comic companies, the other with independent dealers and retailers. In the mid-seventies I used to walk around the con and meet people I knew every few tables. Most of those people have been replaced by a new generation of artists, the majority of whom are employed by the plethora of independent companies that have come into being since the underground comix of the sixties proved the west coast to be a good spot to rebel against the control of the Eastern monopolies. I don't know the inside story on most of these new companies and do not pretend any expertise on their internal structure or politics. I suspect a few are doing quite well financially, while others are hanging on by the skin of their teeth in hopes of winning our in the current weeding out process. What I felt at the con was a sense of *business*. I felt like a stranger walking through the halls of an impersonal building looking at the company names on a lot of doors that were closed to me. Some of the feeling comes from my having grown older and less a part of the scene, but I'm not paranoid; the convention is now closely analogous to the American Booksellers' Convention which I've attended several times. Business has taken over and the joy of art flies out the window when money and business deals are the focal point.

I used to feel like a member of the San Diego Con. I supported it and promoted it. I acted as liaison with Bay Area artists and was reponsible for getting many of them included in the convention in the mid-seventies. I wrote about the con, planted newspaper articles, contributed to the program book, spoke on panels, and I felt like a member of the family. This year I felt like a stranger, just one of hundreds of artists and publishers on a computerized guest list. In the seventies when I went to the banquet and the cocktail party which followed, I met and talked with people like Mike Royer and Jack Kirby and Wally Wood and Gilbert Shelton and Dave Sheridan and Larry Todd and Joyce Farmer and Lyn Chevli and many others; everyone went to the banquet and party. The past couple of years I have seen no one I knew at these giant ballroom parties which are now nothing but a drink hustle for the hotel in which they are given. The invitation is a joke, because anyone can walk in and nothing personal is going to take place there anyway. The real parties are now held in the hotels, private parties for the in-group, paid for by the bosses for the employees.

A few years back I remember Dan O'Neill playing his banjo and singing. Well, it was small then and people had time for each other. They enjoyed the cameraderie and entertained each other. Now it's business and people are dealing. It's bigger hotels like the dreary Omni with its shopping mall atmosphere. I ran into Sody Clampett and she was nostalgic for the early days when we used the El Cortez Hotel.

I guess I kept missing people. I could see Greg Irons sitting at one of Ron Turner's tables drawing pictures of Gregor. I could hear Bob Clampett telling me how he and the guys at Termite Terrace used to get around the censors to get those sex jokes into the cartoons. Larry Todd would be telling me the story of an entire issue of Dr. Atomic. Too many of my friends are dead or have dropped out and I don't know any of these new people and they don't know me or have any interest in knowing me. Why should they? After all, it's business now and what can I do for them? Over the years I gave what I had, encouragement, publicity, tips, introductions, time, energy. For the underground cartoonists, so many of whom died young, I fought a losing battle. I chronicled their work in **COMIX WORLD**, but most of the articles that have appeared in the eighties have continued to focus upon Robert Crumb and a few others to the neglect of everyone else. The star system, inbred in every aspect of American art and entertainment, has prevailed. Ah, well, many are called, but few are chosen. The underground comix needed Fredric Wertham and he didn't come along. If he had, the reaction to his attempt to repress the comix might have given them the impetus needed to escape the hippy ghettos and infiltrate the straight world.

Vestiges of underground comix survive at the convention, but surprisingly enough the alternative or black and white comix which assimilated many of the artists continue to outsell them. The black and whites get distribution, the undergrounds seldom do. I've been told that Larry Welz' **CHERRY POPTART** sells very well at gas stations in the midwest. Looks like it has replaced the eight-pagers of the thirties. Salesmen used to sell the Tiajuana Bibles and eight millimeter sex films all across the midwest and the Bible Belt. They carried their linens and vases and photo albums from town to town going from door to door and visiting with lonely housewives, but they made most of their profit off the under-the counter sex items they sold to gas station and pool hall owners. A drummer from Los Angeles used to sell decks of pornographic playing cards in the Derby where I played pool in Lincoln, Nebraska, as a teenager. He took his custumers back to the john to show them what he had. Got five bucks a deck for cards he probably picked up at a dime a pack by the gross.

Ron Turner was not in the dealer dealer's room, but in the same spot he has had for the past decade or so. Fred Todd had a table for Rip Off Press in the commercial room. I was going to say hello to him but he was always busy when I stopped by and he didn't seem to recognize me anyway. I'm older, but so is he. We have gone from being avant-garde to being somewhat passé, the old dinosaurs hanging on, chased by samurai bunnies and ninja turtles and a menagerie of hostile creatures which, old hat to us, are nevertheless new and exciting to most of the kids swarming bug-eyed about us. I didn't connect with Gilbert Shelton, but Paul Mavrides who is now doing the bulk of the work on the Freak Brothers said Shelton was selling his house and moving back to Europe. Paris, he said.

Jules Feiffer was there for the first time and he's a lot taller than I expected. I listened to him for awhile, but most of what he had to say is in an extensive interview in **THE COMICS JOURNAL** and I see no reason to repeat it here. I've always enjoyed Feiffer's work and still do. Agree with his politics. Disagree